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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000226

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NDDC OFFICIAL SAYS IJAW MILITANTS LIKELY TO STRIKE AGAIN

REF: LAGOS 138 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for Reason 1.4 (D)

SUMMARY

1. (S/NF) During a February 11 conversation with the Consul General, Timi Alaibe, Executive Director for Finance and Administration of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), expressed fear that Ijaw militants would soon honor their threats to cause more disruption in the Delta. Alaibe asserted the militants were angered because the GON was not adhering to its promise of political dialogue which was a key aspect of the agreement precipitating the release of the four expatriate hostages in late January. The agreement also included amnesty for the kidnappers, and a GON pledge to eschew a military reprisal. Bayelsa State Governor Goodluck Jonathan also paid 100 million naira (780,000 USD), a ransom the kidnappers did not demand and which sparked debate among the kidnappers whether to take the unsolicited gift, according to Alaibe. End summary.

NDDC OFFICIAL FEARS MORE VIOLENCE

2. (S) In a recent meeting with the Consul General, Timi Alaibe, Executive Director for Finance and Administration of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), voiced concern that resumption of militant activity was in the offing. While attacks might not be imminent, the frequency and intensity of the militants' threats were escalating, he added. This commotion signalled the militants were progressively getting prepared to take action, he thought. The decision to resume disruptive operations would be taken in the short-term, and would not be long in coming, Alaibe emphasized. The proximate cause for heating the coils under the militants was the GON's failure to engage them in political dialogue. Claiming to be at the core of the negotiations that secured the expatriate quartet's release, Alaibe recounted that the promise of dialogue and of a new political accommodation was a major piece in the release of the hostages. However, since the release, the militant kidnappers have heard mostly silence from the GON. The call to gather at the negotiation table has not come, Alaibe admitted.

3. (S) Consequently, the militants have begun to make calls of their own. He claimed to be the recipient of near daily phone calls by militant leaders, who have bestowed on themselves pompous militaristic titles. While their titles border on the comical, their threats are of a different nature. Alaibe stated at one time, the militants had threatened to attack Warri. They were so bold as to tell the Commander of the Joint Task Force (JTF). Alaibe claimed the JTF Commander pleaded with the militants not to attack the city which is the JTF's headquarters, out of concern for the damage to civilian life it would precipitate. Alaibe now stated that most of the threats are directed at Port Harcourt, with the militants claiming to be moving weapons into that area in preparation for attack.

4. (S) Alaibe also feared the GON might not honor its pledge to eschew reprisals. He recounted that he was "embarrassed" last year when the GON asked him to negotiate with militant leader Dokubo Asari. Alaibe said he engaged Asari on the explicit promise from Abuja that Asari would not be detained. However, some time after his talks with Asari, the militant leader was seized and is currently facing treason charges.

ALAIBE'S VIEWS OF THE HOSTAGE DEAL

5. (S) Describing the hostage talks, Alaibe stated the militants were consistent throughout the ordeal -- they presented political demands and did not solicit a ransom.

Having little nice to say about fellow Bayelsan and current political rival, Bayelsa Governor Goodluck Jonathan, Alaibe inveighed that Jonathan had been singularly ineffective during the negotiations. Alaibe contended the kidnappers had already agreed to release the hostages even before Jonathan's tardy pecuniary intermeddling. As part of an eleventh hour attempt to be seen as instrumental in the release, Jonathan offered the kidnappers 100 million naira they did not even ask for. According to Alaibe, this "bonus" set off a fierce debate, temporarily breaking the militant leaders into two factions. The pragmatists wanted to take the money while the purists sought to rebuff the offer, fearing acceptance of the money would only make them appear to be a more sophisticated variation of the usual Delta-area kidnapping scams. Ultimately, the pragmatists won but not without promising the funds would not be used for self-enrichment but be invested into more weapons and equipment for the group. This was frightening, Alaibe stated, because that particular group, numbering in the hundreds, was already better outfitted than the Nigerian military.

COMMENT

16. (S) Alaibe's comments generally comport with accounts from other sources. While Alaibe's rendition of the negotiations is interesting and gives a glimpse into the mindset of the kidnappers, more telling and alarming is his forecast about future militant action. Alaibe believes the militants are serious and capable of wreaking more damage. He also believes they are motivated in significant degree by what they perceive as injustices against the Ijaw ethnic group, to which he also belongs. It was a bit surprising to hear such deep pessimism about GON action from a senior official in Nigeria's most important and best financed developmental agency in the Niger Delta. Implicit in his forecast is his view that the GON sees this basically as business as usual and thus is not contemplating any change in policy toward the Delta. That he holds such a stark appraisal is one thing. That he was willing to share it, is quite another.

17. (S) To some degree he seemed torn between his allegiance to the GON and his ethnic sympathies. Alaibe wants to be a hero to both. At this moment, he probably feels more like a man caught in the middle of two approaching vehicles and less like a man serving as a bridge to meaningful negotiations. His loyalty is likely to be questioned on both sides. He probably sees the need for international pressure on the GON to help the country and himself out of their respective dilemmas in the Delta. Unfortunately, Alaibe's prediction of more violence will likely prove accurate unless the GON begins to see the Delta through a new lens and begins to look for new prescriptions for problems in that area. End Comment.
BROWNE